

**Secretary Scott Hassett
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Thiensville-Mequon Rotary Club
Mequon, Wisconsin
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Thank you for the invitation and introduction.

My talk is about creating environmental opportunities through community partnerships. It is about a partnership imperative for DNR and the lessons from what I call the Mequon Partnership Model.

These opportunities always existed. However, they have gone wanting because of an inward focus by many of us and a culture that discourages collaboration.

My talk is also about forming partnerships that aspire to achieve together what government, business and non-government parties cannot do alone. It is about the need for a system that links the skills of individuals and organizations with a "can do" attitude so they can better protect and restore the land and water to benefit the entire community.

THE MEQUON PRESERVE

It is no accident that I am speaking in Mequon. I have heard great things about the Mequon Nature Preserve. And from what I saw today, I know those reports are true.

I was impressed with what I saw on the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewage District land near the Little Menomonee River. I am convinced that this upstream land conservation project can be a poster child for The Nature Conservancy's strategy of protecting land for both its aesthetic and functional values.

I stopped at Trinity Creek and saw the impoundment that feeds the Milwaukee River. Stormwater management is an important DNR initiative. Trinity Creek and Mequon's conservation subdivisions show how creative responses to that mandate can enhance property values and your quality of life.

I walked the Mequon Nature Preserve and now appreciate why this property is a gem. I saw how removing drain tile is helping restore the land and water. It is a remarkable sight.

Through your restoration and research plan, this site has the potential to become an important teaching station for reclaiming the land to protect the water. I also was impressed with the contributions of the UW-Milwaukee and volunteer groups such as Wisconsin Waterfowl Association.

Each of those stops provided me stories to share with my leadership team in explaining the Mequon Partnership Model.

I want to commend all that have made this project a success. First and foremost, I applaud Mayor Nuernberg. Her vision and tenacity are evident from the moment you meet her. She would be the first to share that recognition, especially with Dick Paddock. But I have no doubt that this project would not exist if it were not for Christine.

I also want to recognize the DNR employees who are helping Mequon pursue its vision. Representing our region are Director Gloria McCutcheon and grants specialist Dan Kaemmerer. Mayor Nuernberg has called Dan an "amazing" partner and I cannot think of a higher compliment.

THREE DNR THEMES

What I saw this morning supports the evolving themes I am emphasizing as Secretary. These themes will take 15 to 20 years to develop; but they are important to Wisconsin's environment and the DNR's effectiveness. My themes are these:

First, we must adopt "new green thinking" that inspires us to do "great green things" like protecting the environment beyond the minimum and restoring it to a better condition. We now have a law that can help us pursue those goals.

On April 16, Governor Doyle signed Act 276, a law called Green Tier. I commend Senator Kedzie, who was its primary author. This law provides legal standing for a “we can” approach to environmental results. It complements the “you can’t” regulations that require the minimum. Green Tier will help us waste less, reduce costs and build community.

Green Tier has been successfully tested and I hope the pilot projects will inspire environmental entrepreneurs in business and other organizations to sign up.

I am eager to hear the ideas of the Ozaukee-Washington Land Trust whose leaders have been motivated by what they call “the Green Tier mentality.” We can do great things with Green Tier and I can think of no group that is better positioned than the Ozaukee-Washington Land Trust.

Second, we must take back the rivers. Long ago we turned our backs on the rivers and many became polluted and unsightly. Now we must face up to the fact that rivers are a key to our environmental, economic and social future. We must restore their integrity if we are to enter the 21st century in confidence and with a clear conscience.

For example, Mequon and Thiensville are discussing the Town Center Plan along the Milwaukee River and the Rotary Club’s Riverwalk supports that vision. Both the Milwaukee and the Little Menomonee Rivers connect Mequon with neighbors up and down stream.

Collaboration about common interests in land and water can open the doors to conversations on other issues. I am impressed that Milwaukee and Ozaukee County officials participate in your discussions.

Cities like Eau Claire, Fort Atkinson, Oshkosh, Kenosha and Milwaukee already know that cleaner rivers are good for retail, hospitality and professional businesses. Clean rivers are also important to the knowledge workers that fill the high-end jobs that Governor Doyle wants to Grow Wisconsin.

Taking back the rivers means cleaning PCBs from the Fox in Northeast Wisconsin; restoring the free flow of the Baraboo River in Central Wisconsin; cleaning brownfields along the Menomonee River in Milwaukee, and protecting the view-scape along the Mississippi River bluffs. It also means enhancing recreational fishing in rivers like the Milwaukee.

Third, DNR employees must be recognized for their effectiveness as partners as well as enforcers.

DNR employees have been involved in successful partnerships in the past. We will learn from those examples and support employees who want to build on them. Laws like Green Tier will give these partnerships new standing. Projects like the Mequon Nature Preserve will give inspiration for everyone that wants to pursue greater green goals.

We all know that there is more than enough to do environmentally. So it makes sense for the DNR to support environmental entrepreneurs whenever we can. It also makes sense to tap into the strengths of others to complement our strengths.

The first step toward that goal is to get to know each other and walk in each other’s shoes. My staff and I are visiting 100 businesses, municipalities and non-government organizations in what might be called a first step to a new level of collaboration.

USING EACH OTHER’S STRENGTHS

Successful partnerships can be like successful business mergers. They involve shared visions, mutual trust, pooled resources and skills that complement each other. They also require supportive cultures and systems.

I want to focus on three players in the Mequon Partnership Model and their skills. Other interests and competencies exist but these three illustrate systems, tools and diverse skills needed for solid partnerships.

The three are The City of Mequon, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and the Ozaukee-Washington Land Trust. Their skills involve visioning, convening, financial management, real estate transactions, governance and property management.

The City of Mequon brought a compelling vision to the project through resolutions, investments and authority. This made the project real and provided an anchor for financial and other partners. Financial security was possible through the taxing and bonding authority.

Local regulations have been developed for conservation subdivisions and codes enforced for buildings, land use and public access. The city has data relating to the land and community. This is important for planning and management decisions on public and private lands.

The Greater Milwaukee Foundation was a project banker and had credibility with community and business leaders. With that credibility, it could professionally and efficiently solicit, manage and invest funds.

Sometimes that investment reaches beyond environmental protection in a complementary way to include community building through the arts and learning. Its tax-exempt status provided value to donors. Like most community foundations, it could play a convening role as a respected neutral party. It can convene a meeting of diverse stakeholders without being suspected of having an agenda.

The Ozaukee-Washington Land Trust can quickly acquire land and then manage it efficiently. Part of this is because the land trust is small and agile. Land trusts also can do grant writing, advocacy and easement monitoring.

Others have helped as well. The Alexian Village fills the Nature Preserve's business approach and public relations needs. There was financial support from businesses like American Transmission, We-Energies, MLG Inc. and others. There are many individuals who also are helping make it happen.

A key message in all of this is that the DNR was a facilitator and supporter, not the leader. In the future, DNR will work hard to play the role that makes the most sense in achieving the results. The experience we are gaining in Mequon can help us make those judgments.

The reason I provided the skills inventory and model is simple. DNR's record is one of broad shoulders and leadership. This has accomplished much.

We are facing a different future, however; it is one that will require a greater reliance on partnerships. It is great that we have so many citizens, businesses and organizations that are eager to be partners for nature. That means Wisconsin can accomplish more than other states that don't have that ethic.

Depending upon the situation, DNR employees may find themselves at a round table instead of the head table. There will be times when local government, a land trust or a business will take the lead or assume most of a project's burdens.

That is not only okay with me, it is great! It means that DNR will consider working with others to be core work. It is a job that many employees do well now, but many more will be absolutely great at in the DNR of the future.

That change may be difficult. But it is necessary, especially if we are to pursue great environmental goals that DNR cannot achieve alone.

These are goals that may develop in the community instead of the capital city, and in local government rather than state government. They also may be goals that are pursued through business partnerships and the Green Tier law rather than regulatory law. That is fine with me, too.

THE MEQUON MODEL

Earlier, I mentioned the Mequon Partnership Model. I have an outsider's eyes. And I think you have something very special that offers many lessons. Here are what I see as the six key attributes of the Mequon Partnership Model.

First, you have a compelling vision that erases lines and transcends time. The vision of the Preserve is to restore land that connects to and protects the water. This land crosses the imaginary lines that divide communities and so this project will benefit the larger community and beyond.

Second, you check your guns at the door. You go into partnership meetings not to defend your turf but to achieve common goals.

You believe that business, government and non-government interests are members of a community with shared responsibilities that trump past rivalries.

Third, you bring out the best in your partners. You know what they're good at and you support them. You also build trust among partners. One of the first rules of successful partnerships is to make straight the path by focusing on tangible results and not get sidetracked. You are focused.

Fourth, you create value for everyone. That can mean giving business a tax break, a developer higher property value, a citizen a quiet place to walk or a service club the recognition it deserves.

For the land and water, you are doing more than protecting it, you are restoring it. And that's the value you are creating for future generations and as such earning priceless psychic pay for yourselves.

Fifth, you see the big picture. Partners are not confined by a narrow mandate to provide recreation, or forests or sewage treatment. They are eager to think outside the box and so find new ways to solve problems like flooding and groundwater depletion.

Sixth, you see actions as learning opportunities. The Preserve provides opportunities for learning about native peoples, settlements, natural history, agriculture, forestry, hydrology, soils and restoration ecology. By looking upstream and downstream you learn about your neighbors and they learn about you.

The role of UW-M under the Milwaukee Idea is important. Another asset is the Milwaukee Area Technical College Campus in Mequon. The Preserve also is a great example of adaptive, restoration ecology.

I encourage those involved in the Mequon Partnership Model to develop these points. You have something special and are obliged to share it.

THE NEXT STEPS

In closing, I want to make an invitation. Many of you represent service organizations, local governments, land trusts, foundations and businesses that favor partnerships. The Department is eager to hear more about what you can bring to nature's common table and what DNR can bring to your community:

What are your strengths and what is your capacity to contribute?

How can our interests complement yours?

What are the barriers to our working together as partners?

In the next month, my policy staff members will gather information to help me in many areas. But especially, I will focus on promoting new green thinking through Green Tier, taking back the rivers through land and water policies and enhancing DNR's standing through partnerships.

So my last message is a request for help.

Help me build a DNR of possibilities...a DNR that aspires to greater green goals through partnerships...a DNR that inspires us to achieve together what it is impossible to do alone.

CONCLUSION

I recall the Pogo comic strip about society and the environment. You remember what Pogo said about all of us: "We have met the enemy and it is us."

It is time to challenge Pogo with a new way of thinking about the environment. I prefer to see citizens for their potential to restore the environment by working together through positive actions rather than threatening it through divisiveness and neglect.

That potential exists in Wisconsin and it is growing here in Mequon.

Thank you.

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